

When the Right Just Can't Let Go

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 3, 2009 NCR Today

I know that it is time to let the souls of the dead rest in peace, but it seems the issue of Senator Ted Kennedy's funeral will not go away. The hierarchy's complete rejection of the rejectionist stance of some conservative Catholics has caused some to grab at straws.

First, there was the charge that Cardinal O'Malley had snubbed Vice-President Joe Biden by not shaking his hand when the cardinal greeted President Obama. The cardinal's spokesman pointed out that Mr. Biden had arrived earlier and the cardinal and he had spoken at that time, before the President arrived. Videotape of the Mass showed Cardinal O'Malley and the Vice-President even sharing a laugh before the Mass began.

Others have floated the idea that Cardinal O'Malley showed his disdain for the proceedings by presiding but not concelebrating. In fact, a bishop always presides when he is present but if he concelebrates, he is automatically the principal celebrant. For example, when a priest has his first Mass, if a prelate is in attendance, the prelate is "in coro" as O'Malley was, and can preach or not, but he cannot concelebrate or the new priest could not be the principal celebrant. The first time I met Cardinal O'Malley, we were both at a funeral for the mother of a priest. Her son was the principal celebrant and then-Bishop O'Malley was "in coro" as was Cardinal Aponte. At the conclusion of the Mass, Cardinal Aponte put on his cope and miter and conducted the commendation rite as O'Malley did at Kennedy's funeral.

I must say I find it odd to be commending Judie Brown who at least is honest about her disagreement with the Cardinal for presiding. These attempts to try and "explain" how O'Malley showed his displeasure put a big, fat lie on top of a warped sense of pastoral solicitude, like a dollop of spoiled whipped cream on a piece of stale cake. They have been definitively and thoroughly refuted now by the cardinal himself as noted below. He was there because it was right to be there and he did not snub anyone.

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